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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001778

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: THE PRO-KURDISH DTP - ITS ELECTION AND
POST-ELECTION PROSPECTS

REF: ADANA 78

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The largest and most influential pro-Kurdish political party, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), running candidates as independents, seems set to take some two dozen seats in the July 22 parliamentary election. This is enough seats to form a parliamentary group and -- if DTPers stick to their moderate rhetoric -- potentially wield some clout in the new parliament. The DTP, however, has links with the terrorist PKK and it is unclear just how moderate their voice will be. Their candidacies stand in sharp contrast to a rise in PKK violence, which seems aimed at creating further divisions and instability in Turkey's southeast. PM Erdogan has called on DTPers who enter parliament to be responsible political actors, not beholden to a terrorist organization. How DTP acts in parliament will prove a bellwether for openly Kurdish aspirations in Turkey for years to come. End summary.

DTP Endorsing "Independent" Candidates

12. (C) In recent meetings throughout southeastern Turkey, local politicians, journalists and businesspeople told us that DTP-endorsed independent candidates are expected to win up to two dozen seats in Parliament in the July 22 elections. In the region's most populous provinces, Diyarbakir and Van, the party is expected to win a total of eight seats, while winning one or two seats in 10 other southeastern provinces plus in selected regions of western Turkey (reftel). Should they win at least 20 seats, they will have enough to form a formal parliamentary group, entitled to floor time and allowed to present legislative proposals. DTP officials, including party chairman Ahmet Turk, have stressed that their parliamentarians will work to achieve their objectives by working responsibly with other parties and avoiding the type of confrontational stunt -- specifically, insisting on speaking in Kurdish when taking the oath of office -- that landed their predecessors (including Turk himself) in hot water in the early 1990s.

13. (C) PM Erdogan has publicly thrown down the "moderation" gauntlet to DTP, calling on those who enter parliament after the July 22 elections to be responsible political actors. He implied that, should he lead Turkey's next government, that government could work with (though not be in coalition with)

the DTP if their aims and behavior are moderate. The PM also made clear that if DTP wants to play a constructive role in parliament, it cannot be beholden to the terrorist PKK. The PM's Justice and Development Party (AKP) believes it can benefit from DTP support within parliament on democratic reforms, but not if the votes are PKK-tainted.

¶4. (C) That there are links between the DTP and the terrorist PKK is clear. Some noted to us that the DTP has parachuted candidate into districts, which will make them answer to the group that put them there -- a political practice in Turkey not unique to DTP. In previous meetings with DTP chairman Ahmet Turk, we have urged him unequivocally to condemn PKK violence; he has demurred, saying that while he abhors violence, it would be political suicide for him to issue such a public statement. In indications of Turk's attempt to push the envelope, he condemned the May Ankara bombing; attempted (unsuccessfully) to place some relatively independent Kurdish moderates on the election lists, such as Diyarbakir Bar President Sezgin Tanrikulu, and tried (again, unsuccessfully) to enter an election alliance with two small Kurdish parties, KADEP and HAK-PAR, both untainted by any association with violence. Regarding the still-born election alliance, HAK-PAR chairman Serdac Bucak told us that Kurdish society wants unity, "but the decision was made elsewhere - by the PKK." And with respect to his proposed candidacy, Tanrikulu explained to us that, based on his discussions with the DTP about his candidacy, it was clear they wanted obedient servants, not independent thinkers (also hardly unique among political parties, unless the organization pulling strings is the PKK).

¶5. (C) But some of the DTP's established figures are not helping to convey a moderate party image. A case in point is

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Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir, under investigation for remarks he made in a recent interview on pro-PKK Roj TV, in which he categorized the PKK as fighters (not terrorists).

PKK Breathing Fire

¶6. (C) Equally puzzling is the PKK's stepped up activities in recent weeks, further raising the temperature in an already tense region and political race. Many observers are suspicious that the PKK's increased attacks are deliberately intended to provoke stepped up Turkish military activity in the southeast, further aggravating pre-existing cleavages between Turks and Kurds. It is also possible that the PKK, which does not exercise absolute control over DTP, may not want the party to succeed in the political arena, where a group of pro-Kurdish MPs could steal the limelight and media attention, as well as rob the PKK of its primacy on the Kurdish issue.

Comment

¶7. (C) The July 22 general election remains an opportunity for DTP and Turkey's Kurds. How they choose to play their card -- how brave they are in the face of inevitable PKK pressure -- may determine the voice, or lack thereof, in Turkey of those with Kurdish ethnic aspirations for years to come.

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